

MINUTES
(Subject to approval by the Committee)
Federal Lands Interim Committee
Thursday, October 09, 2014
6:30 P.M.
City Council Chambers
City Hall
Soda Springs, Idaho

Cochairman Senator Chuck Winder called the meeting to order. Other members present were Cochairman Representative Lawrence Denney, Senator John Tippets, Senator Sheryl Nuxoll, Senator Michelle Stennett, Representative Terry Gestrin and Representative Mat Erpelding. Senator Bart Davis, Representative Mike Moyle and Representative Stephen Hartgen were absent and excused. Mike Nugent was the LSO staff member present.

Other persons present were Lori Anne Lau, Caribou County Farm Bureau; Mark Harris; Jon Goode, Agrium; Bob Geddes, Idaho Farm Bureau and Chad Harris.

Mr. Mike Nugent, LSO staff, gave background information on the committee's charge. He explained that the purpose of the committee is to give the Legislature more time to study the subject that is too complex to complete during the regular legislative session. This committee is a two-year committee that ceases to exist after November 30, 2014. In order to continue beyond that date the Legislature will have to approve another concurrent resolution or enact a statute. The committee was formed pursuant to the adoption of [HCR21](#) and [HCR22](#) during the 2013 Legislature. He also explained that all information from past meetings is available on the LSO website at: www.legislature.idaho.gov

Written testimony was also accepted by the committee and that is posted at: <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/sessioninfo/2014/interim/lands.htm>

Senator Winder explained that this is going to be a long-term process that will probably require a recommendation for some type of land commission to pursue the opportunities that are out there regarding federal land transfers. He noted that a lot of other states are interested in the issue as well and that it is a bipartisan issue across the West. **Senator Winder** noted that it is not easy and, if the state got all of the federal land back, there would still be endangered species and EPA issues to deal with. He added that the committee wanted to reach out to communities that are impacted by these federal regulations and hear concerns and stories about how they are impacted.

Ms. Lori Anne Lau said she was representing herself and her views are not necessarily that of the Caribou County Farm Bureau. She said by training she is a range manager or range scientist and the state taking over federal lands is an interesting idea. She said in her job she interacts frequently with U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management land managers and she thinks they do an excellent job for what they are required to administer. She voiced concern that if the state takes over the public lands, the new bureaucracy would be just like the federal government system that exists today. In her opinion, the goal of this transfer is to use the lands to a greater degree than they are currently used. She noted that there is concern from the public that there needs to be continued access to hunting and fishing grounds. **Ms. Lau** said she thinks the state taking over the public lands is a great idea, but the devil will be in the details. She said she would individually favor selling some of the land to individuals because they would have the opportunity to provide better stewardship, but that some mechanism would have to be inserted in the deed to allow sportsmen's access if these lands were valuable for fishing, hunting or other recreation.

Mr. Mark Harris a rancher from Bear Lake County who runs cows on U.S. Forest Service lands thinks the state managing these lands is a good idea. He said when the U.S. Government shutdown occurred, there were no Forest Service personnel on duty and all logging operations had to cease

until the compromise was reached. He said the same thing could have happened to grazers and he felt that the federal government was holding the federal lands hostage until the budget compromise was reached. He said the timber companies lost valuable dollars during the shutdown. He feels that the state can manage these lands better than the federal government.

Mr. Chad Harris comes from a ranching family and is a young person trying to get a start in the livestock business. He said he has tried to obtain U.S. Forest Service allotments but the red tape has been discouraging. **Mr. Harris** said that the grazing allotments have been greatly reduced over the years and Forest Service personnel do not seem to know what is happening on the ground. **Representative Erpelding** said he sympathizes with **Mr. Harris** as he has had his own frustrations obtaining permits from federal personnel. **Representative Erpelding** said he was not sure that the state takeover would be a panacea.

In response to a question from **Mr. John Goode** regarding how the state would fund this, **Senator Winder** said that is something that needs to be addressed. He said there are some items in the last federal farm bill for collaboration between state and federal entities regarding management of public lands. **Senator Winder** cited a statistic that there are two million acres in the West infested with insects that need to be thinned or managed and there are \$117 trillion worth of assets on federal lands. **Senator Tippetts** agreed that the costs involved in such a transfer need to be addressed. He emphasized that the committee has more questions too.

Senator Winder said there are members of the environmental community that have frustrations with the federal management of the public lands. **Representative Erpelding** said if the state does take over the lands, there will still be the EPA to worry about. **Ms. Lau** said she could envision the Land Board working with a local board of some kind in administering these lands.

Mr. Bob Geddes, former President Pro Tempore of the Idaho Senate, said in his professional and political life he has had a lot of interaction with federal land managers. He said one problem is that federal agencies often do not have local people and when people are transferred in, they are encouraged not to get too friendly with people in the community with whom they are interacting. He used the example of a Forest Service employee who came to Soda Springs, got involved in church and service organization activities and was quickly transferred.

Mr. Geddes said Utah came up with a creative idea that western children were being shortchanged compared to their midwestern, southern or eastern counterparts because there is virtually no money going to education from the public lands in the West. Whereas, in older states, the state got the public lands and the money from those lands serves as a tax base for schools.

Mr. Geddes said in the West extraction industries are having a tough time existing because of environmental laws and national forest or BLM plans. He used the example of a local lumber company that was relying on timber from private and state lands with virtually none from the Forest Service. He said he had been to a Forest Service office and there were many areas of insect-infested forests that were going to be the target for a controlled burn rather than a thinning by cutting or harvesting. **Mr. Geddes** said the federal government and agencies ought to be paying attention to this process because there is a citizenry out there that is not satisfied with the status quo in the land management area.

The public hearing adjourned at 7:30 p.m.